Inequality In Education In Today's Britain

How extensive is educational inequality in Britain today? Critically assess the different explanations that have been advanced to account for educational inequalities

This essay seeks to discuss inequality in education. It attempts to explore the central issues around social class such as the upper, middle and working-class, which includes legislation and policies and the important role they play within educational achievements. It will discuss the tripartite system, meritocratic system and equal opportunities. Inequality in education is a major problem in society today (Pardeck, 2008). Therefore, this essay will look into the causes and problems of education inequality and conclude with what government and social factors need to do in relation to legislations as to how to address the problems. However, to tackle or diminish these issues and overcome these problems may be difficult but more work and research needs to be done in these areas. Education is a foundation platform in an individuals life and this begins from a young age. Education achievement will provide individuals with having a better and utmost position in society(Pardeck, 2008).

Education is defined as the process of acquiring knowledge, understanding and implementing it, as well as skill beliefs of morals, values, teaching, learning (Smith, 2018)

In early Victorian times in England children did not go to school which lead them to become illiterate.. These children were sent to work to earn a living for their families. Children of the upper and middle class went to schools (Borrow,2013)

In the 1870s legislation was passed the Fosters Education Act (1870) which stated that Britain must provide schools for children from the age of five to 12 years. public and private schools were for the offsprings of the rich and powerful and fee-paying schools which the poor could not afford. Free charity schools and Sunday church schools provided a short basic education for the poor, as working-class people could not afford their children to have a formal education (Borrow,2013).

The Victorians soon realised that it was important for every individual to read and write. Queen Victoria’s reign brought improvements to education focusing on the poor. Their idea was that all children must attend school. In 1880 schools became mandatory on all children until the age of 10 years followed by 1889 when the school leaving age changed to 12 years. Furthermore, In 1891 schools fees were abolished and became free(Borrow 2013). The aim of each school was somehow quite different when the majority schools became free and fees were abolished (Halevy 1951) After 1870 state education was available to everyone, however, the types of education received was based on their social class background. Public and grammar schools for the wealthy and elementary schools for the working class. In 1880 schooling became compulsory it was stated all children must attend school until the age of 10, and in 1889 the leaving age was raised to 12 years followed by 1891 (Halevy, 1951).

In 1902 The Balfour Act (Conservative Education Act 1902) bought extreme changes to the

whole education system. The divide between schools run by school boards and Church of England weakened which only educated one third. Local Education Authorities were developed which set up local tax rates. Funds were given for that religious education owned by Church of England and Catholic schools (Halevy ,1951).

Searle(1951) argues that the Act (1902) was a political disaster, ignoring those of various religious backgrounds. Moreover, The Fisher Education Act (1918) made secondary schools compulsory to the age of 14 and gave the state the responsibility of them. Under this Act many elementary schools and Grammar schools were funded by the state. The Act also provided part-time education for 14 to 18-year-olds and had plans to extend to further education, but were unable to do so due to the cuts in public spending after World War 1 (Searle, 1951).

A report by Spens (1938) mentions the recommendation of intelligence testing for children to gain entry into school. This was followed by 1943 Norwood report which recommended the tripartite system of secondary education which was implemented in 1940. The introduction to the Butlers Act (1944) which was an answer to education and social reform after the World War2. Butler The Conservative Government defined the split between primary and secondary education at a set age of 11 years (Livesy, 2010).

The basic aim of the Education Act (1944) was to give every pupil an equal chance to fully develop his/her abilities within a free system of state education. The structure of education in England and Wales was reorganised in three stages. Primary Education was up to 11 years, Secondary from 11-15 years of age and further/ higher education beyond school leaving age, but this was by choice (Thompson 2016).

Furthermore, there were three different types of schools within the secondary schooling: Grammar, Secondary Modern and Technical. This was known as the tripartite system of secondary education. Butler hoped that these schools would foster for the different academic levels and other aptitudes of children. Entry for these schools was based on the 11 plus examination and a means of allocating children to one of these schools. The tripartite system was intended to provide a separate but equal type of schooling based on the academic level of each child. The Act states that each school should have equal status, with structure, equipment and staffing and similar quality. However, these ideas did not work into practice (Thompson,2016).

The tripartite system reflected on the social divisions in society despite the fact of fees being abolished. Working-class children were less likely in comparison to the middle class to gain entry in grammar schools. The 1944 Act was based on the ideology of equality in educational opportunities. Clearly, this was not working when a number of working-class children were consigned to secondary modern schools and these schools were seen as levels of second rate and substandard. The lower chances of achievement were reinforced by the inequality in educations (Crook et al 1999).

Butler Act (1944) removed all choices to a meritocracy system, where theoretically everyone was given a chance of equality in education based on their IQ levels called the 11 plus test. This would show if the child was good in academic, technical or practical and would be allocated the school which fitted best for them. Those pupils who were identified as suitable for practical schooling and wanted to attend an academic grammar education, their parents would have to pay the fees. The majority could not afford the fees. This left them with no option but to send

their children to the school best recommended and this continues to happen in society today (Peck, 2004).

The Butler Act (1944) created a pass and fail system which divided pupils at the age of 11 and upwards, either to be successful or not. Those living in socially deprived areas were of the failures and continued with the cycle of deprivation (Green; 2005; Smith 2002) It is further suggested by Smith (2002) that those who failed the 11 plus test parents of those had no desire to re-enter them in the 12 plus examination as they accepted the fact their child we're being failures. Another reason for pupils not achieving their potential goals in technical schools was due to not having skilled teachers (Peck, 2004).

It is also argued that those who passed the 11 plus test were not suited for Grammar school education and did very bad in their education, a former conservative Prime Minister was a prime example (Major, 2000).

In addition, a high proportion of A level students and sixth formers, and those entering further or higher education are from the middle-class background. Although the working class enter further education, they are more than likely to take up a lower status course in comparison to the middle class educated, such as apprenticeship rather than A levels leading to higher education (Thomson, 2016)

It has been criticised that the Comprehensive system believed to have failed in two ways. According to Bowe (1995) comprehensive schools have not promoted greater equality of opportunities, rather the opposite. Intelligent children from poorer backgrounds could prosper in the times of the 11 plus, however, in comprehensive schools they are held back. The critics say that the comprehensive schools only provide a poor standard of education, due to lack of teaching standards and cutting costs, also excellence is unrewarded and specialisation is discouraged (Bowe,1995).

One different level of achievement in education could be found within the circumstances of the home, where poverty is a key factor low wages are concentrated amongst the semi-skilled and unskilled levels of the working class. These low levels can have an important effect on school performance. Poor living conditions, such as overcrowding, poor heating and not having a balanced diet can put a strain on one's health which could lead to illnesses resulting in low school attendance and falling behind in studies and attaining low grades. Another factor is low wages and unemployment can result in not able to afford educational resources, school trips and other hidden costs of free state education which could affect a childs educational development. However, in such circumstances, pupils may feel encouraged to leave school as soon as they turn sixteen to find a job to support themselves or their homes and families (Young, 1989).

Furthermore, another factor in lacking education achievement lies within parents attitudes towards education. Middle-class parents place a higher value on their children's education and take more interest in schooling attainments and progression in comparison to working-class parents. It could be argued that middle-class parents interests in their child's education can have a positive impact on the child itself and interest grows to achieve higher as they grow older(Young, 1989). The positive influence of having parents in high paid jobs and professions increase the chances of the child wanting to do better and reach their full potential. These parents can afford to continue to support their children as money is not an issue to them. It

could also be argued that working-class parents do not encourage their children to study or stay beyond school leaving age is merely due to poverty restrictions and not because they lack interest. Therefore they see the sooner the child is able to work the easier the load of stress concerning income is released. This impacts on a child's thoughts and view that education is a waste of time and money is necessary. Regardless of ability, parental attitudes can also affect the child's learning abilities, facilities and other necessities of education development (Young, 1989)

Althusser (1971) follows Marxists views which argued that power and control were in the hands of the bourgeois who used both the repressive state and the ideological state and the working class where mislead by ideas. Althusser believed that the education system was part of an ideological state and the working class were being prepared to accept a life of being treated unfairly and the bourgeois would benefit from their work (Thompson,2016).

Durkheim's views were very similar, he believed that education played a vital role and taught norms and values of society to individuals. Althusser states these norms and values are only based around the interest of the upper class which stops the social change of society (Thompson, 2016).

Moreover, what makes the upper class much better in educational achievement is how the intellect is conveyed, which is linked to their upbringing in their family surroundings, it is one means through which the upper-class families secure educational benefits for their offsprings (Sulivan,2001). This shows that educational policy benefits those who are supported by their parents or families and are gifted with intelligence allowing them to achieve educational achievements but it does not educate or give to those students from working class families who do not have these capitals or intellect this is similar to Sulivan when she states "the educational system fails to give explicitly to everyone that which is implicitly demands of everyone" Sulivan(2001). Given this it shows that the education and the system plays a crucial part in conserving the recent class inequalities in the system of education and does not dispute it, in fact, it maintains new opinions and attitudes in educational inequalities, but some working-class pupils will attain high grades in comparison to upper-class peers, however, Bourdieu referred to in Sulivan 2001 argues that these working-class students attaining these grades will not challenge the system but continue, instead of challenging the system will be added as numbers to show a meritocracy (Sulivan,2001).

Although, current reform government policies have not implemented equalities in education as two-thirds of headteachers believe that these policies are resulting in an increase in inequalities in schools which is having an impact on the education of individuals Savage (2018). The reforms implemented in the expansion of academies and cutting back education from local authority schools education and letting the schools take in control of their curriculums. However, the analysis shows that this has made no difference in the education of pupils in academies in Primary or Secondary schools (Savage,2018).

Former Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg states inequality is in many shapes and forms. It is not only based upon the wealth of the upper class but the region you live in takes an affect and it impacts on individual lives. According to new research it states that a great number of children are under achieving educational attainments due to regional inequalities in education. The Independent think tank social market foundation report states that the geographical outcomes of education inequalities has grown since the last three decades. 70% of pupils in London achieve

five or more A star to C GCSE’s, and 63% in Yorkshire and Humber (Weale, 2016).

It also states family income is seen as a major factor in education success. Policies have been introduced such as pupil premium, extra funding to help those from disadvantaged background, however it is still a high concern for those living in certain areas including ethnic minorities (Weale, 2016).

Ethnicity is another major area we can explore when it talks about inequality in Schools. Academic achievement is still a major difference between the groups of ethnic minorities (Bazeley, 2010). In the triennial review (2010) shows the difference in percentages around the groups of ethnic minorities achieving 5+ good GCSE’s. Chinese (72%), Indian (67%), Bangladeshi, Black African and white average of (51%), Black Caribbean (39%) and Pakistani (43%).(Bazeley, 2010).

Ethnic minorities going into higher education has increased by 20% (Hillage et al, 2004), but the quality of degrees are still behind the statistics of white peers as they are less likely to receive a first or second upper class degree. Bazeley (2010) in his report states 7 out of 10 (67%), white students leave university with a successful degree of first or second upper class degree in comparison 4 out of 10 (38%) student of colour (Bazeley, 2010).

Phoniex and Law et al (2001) argue that students of colour under achieve due to the impact of institutionalised racism in Britain by tutors and peers, and Britain is institutionally racist. They discriminate ethnic minority students in a stereotypical way(Phoniex, 2001).

However; this has an afeffect on these students of colour in success and opportunities, making it an unequal society whether it is direct or indirect. (Back, 2004). He states that universities are not equal or neutral places of study and he believes institutional racism is a high factor within the education sector (Back et al, 2004).

Researchers from the institute of education Professors Toby Greany and Rob Higham (2018) collected case studies from 47 schools in 2014-2017 which involved pupils from different backgrounds and classes to evaluate the impact on pupils attainments and progress in multi-academy trusts (MATS). They found that even though the government’s aim was to ‘move the control to the frontline’ (DFE 2016). But it did not work this way. Schools were facing extreme pressures in relation to the achievement grading system and Ofsted results and being taken over by MAT. Majority of schools had to shorten the curriculum and focus on the outcomes of the test (Greany, Higham, 2018)

The government wanted schools to work alongside each other and support those schools which were struggling to reach their full potential. However, this was an added problem as each individual school was under a lot of pressure due to the grading system and achievements

Conclusion

After drawing up the necessary levels of inequalities within education it concludes that although educational achievements between social classes have not changed tremendously over the years, the difficulties remain within the race, social class educational inequalities. Despite the effort of first the Tripartite system and the comprehensive system to secure equality of

educational opportunities. However children of equal abilities but from different social class backgrounds, ethnicity and gender are as yet not achieving the same success in education they should be. Compensatory education has not overcome the disadvantages faced by many pupils in education. We live in an unequal society where different groups and classes do not see the educational race on equal terms. In such a society the combined effects of socialisation, home and social class background, teachers attitudes, middle-class language and culture of the school and the continued existence of a privileged private sector of education will mean the realisation of the ideal of equality of educational opportunities will remain an impossible dream

The idea of meritocracy is seen as appealing for individuals. It creates this idea of moving beyond in life from where you started of fairness and flourishing. However looking at the evidence it clearly shows it is a blurred vision for inequality, with the ideas of politicians and their supporters who think they can wipe out the inequalities within the education system and form Britain the best meritocracy place to live in. Moreover, to bury meritocracy there has not been a better time Wilkinson (2017).